

Minaean language

The **Minaean language** (also **Minaic**, **Madhabaic** or **Madhābic**) language was an Old South Arabian or Ṣayhadic language spoken in Yemen in the times of the Old South Arabian civilisation. The main area of its use may be located in the al-Jawf region of North-East Yemen, primarily in the Wādī Madhāb. Most of texts in this language were composed by the Minaeans, but the other civil-temple communities of the Wādī Madhāb (Nashshan, Kaminahu, Haram, and Inabba') also used it as a literary medium.

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Minaean	
Native to	Yemen
Era	1200 BC – 100 AD
Language family	<div>Afro-Asiatic<ul style="list-style-type: none">Semitic<ul style="list-style-type: none">South<ul style="list-style-type: none">Western<ul style="list-style-type: none">Old South Arabian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Minaean</div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	Either: <div><div>inm – Minaean</div><div>xha – Harami</div></div>
Linguist List	inm (http://multitree.org/codes/inm) <div>Minaean</div>
	xha (http://multitree.org/codes/xha) <div>Harami</div>
Glottolog	mina1279 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mina1279) Minaean ^[1]

History

The earliest Minaean inscriptions are contemporary with the earliest Sabaeen ones, i.e. the 8th century BCE, though they are less numerous, and come from the cities along Wadi Madhaab, to the north-east of Ma'rib. Minaean trading posts, and Minaean inscriptions are also found outside South Arabia, as in the ancient oasis of Dēdan (the present day Al-`Ula in Saudi Arabia), and even on the Greek island of Delos and in Egypt. Minaean seems to disappear as a written language about the end of the 2nd century BCE.

Phonology

The phonology of the ancient Minaean language seems to be essentially similar to that of the other Old South Arabian language. One peculiarity of Minaean is that it writes the phoneme /s/ in foreign names as /ṭ/ (e.g., Delos becomes *dl ṭ* ^[2]), but still keeps the phoneme distinct in native words.^[3]

Minaean seems to insert an etymologically unexplained *h* in certain nominal endings, pronouns and particles; some plurals also exhibit this same feature: *bhn* and *bhnt*, plurals of *bn* (son). These may be plene writings of a long vowel other than /u:/ or /i:/.

Grammatical Features Peculiar to Minaean

Due to the limited amount of texts that have survived, many forms are not attested, though hopefully the discovery of new texts will provide us with more source material. In Minaean external plurals seem to be especially common; an -h is often used at the end of words in the construct state, even in the singular.

Minaean Nominal Endings

	Construct	Indeterminate	Determinate
Sing. /broken plur.	-h, no ending	-(m)	-n
Dual	-y, -hy	-ny	-nhn, -nyhn
External Plural	-hw, -hy	-hn	

(Compare the table given under [Sabaean language](#).)

Relative Pronouns

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	dy-	ḏt
Dual	dy	ḏtyn
Plural	'hl, hl	

Particles

Whereas Sabaean uses the preposition *l-* to mean "to(wards)", or to express the dative case, Minaean often has *k-* (compare Ḥaḏramitic *h-*). The particle *k-* has a prefixed *s*₂ in Minaean, as in *bn s₂-kḏ*^[4] "from (the possibility) that ...". Minaean, like the other non-Sabaean languages also has a temporal conjunction *mty* ("when").

The Minaean negative particle, which has been so far badly attested, is *lhm*.

Verbs

Minaean is distinguished from the other Old South Arabian languages by having an extra form for verb stems with a reduplicated second radical, spelled f^ʿ ʿl (as in ʿlly, "raise" ^[5]).

Conjugation of the Perfect Tense

Minaean, like the other South Arabian languages, forms the Perfect tense by adding suffixes. Unlike the other dialects, however, it does not write the dual and plural endings, they are therefore the same as the singular; for example: *s₃l'* ("he/they dedicated").



Minaean inscription from ancient oasis of Dēdan (the present day Al-ʿUla in Saudi Arabia).

References

1. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Minaean" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/mina1279>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
2. Inscription: R3570/3.
3. Roger D. Woodward: The Ancient Languages of Syro-Palestine and Arabia. Article of Nebes and Sterin: Ancient South Arabian. Pg. 150.
4. Inscription R 2980/13 = Shaqab 19/13)
5. Inscription: M 203/2.

Bibliography

- Leonid Kogan and Andrey Korotayev: Sayhadic Languages (Epigraphic South Arabian). *Semitic Languages*. London: Routledge, 1997, p. 157-183.
- Andrey Korotayev. *Ancient Yemen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 (https://www.academia.edu/32711023/ANCIENT_YEMEN_Oxford_University_Press_1995). ISBN 0-19-922237-1

External links

- [Corpus of Minaic Inscriptions \(http://dasi.cnr.it/index.php?id=44&prjId=1&corId=28&colId=0\)](http://dasi.cnr.it/index.php?id=44&prjId=1&corId=28&colId=0) from the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI)
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